

## Modern Man's Superiority Complex Is Modern Man Superior to His Predecessors?

Christopher Dawson, in his well known work, *Progress and Religion* encapsulates the modern notion that newer is always better in the following words: “The Doctrine of Progress in the full sense must involve the belief that every day and in every way the world grows better and better.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, not only is the world getting better, but man himself is getting better. There is a not so subtle superiority complex in modern man when he considers himself in relation to his predecessors. After all, modern man has computers, DVDs, hi-tech automobiles, jet aircraft and the achievement of putting men on the moon, among other things. There is a certain smugness in the average modern man who thinks to himself how much better he is than those earlier in history who knew nothing of digital movies, atomical physics and evolution.

This superiority complex has a serious side to it. The idea that modern man is somehow better is a psychological motive force behind embracing the principle of immanence, which makes the individual or self the principle of judgment of all things. As a result, some modern intellectuals have rejected realistic metaphysics and philosophy. After all, if modern man is as superior as we say, he ought to think of himself and not the dry arguments of his unknowing, and perhaps even less intelligent, predecessors.

For these reasons, this article will focus on the following claims. The first is that modern man is superior to his ancestors in the order of knowledge. Second, that modern man is superior to his predecessors in the moral order. Third, modern man is superior to his predecessors in the sociological/political order. Lastly, because of modern man's superiority together with the intellectual foundation for that superiority, modern man is not able to accept the scholastic arguments in areas of philosophy and natural theology. While these claims will be considered, it must be conceded that not all men today consider modern man as superior. However, those more “up-to-date” individuals look upon the objectors as naive, unintelligent or ignorant.

### I. The Intellectual Genesis of the Complex

We must ask ourselves how we got to a point in history where many have contracted the idea, at least vaguely in the day to day living of their lives, that newer is always better. Philosophically, this idea gets off the ground with G.W.F. Hegel. The well-known Hegelian dialectic consists in three stages. The first is what came to be known as the thesis, in which a particular state of affairs was in place. Then, the negation of that state of affairs by the antithesis comes to pass and finally the resolution of the thesis into the antitheses occurs by means of a synthesis. Process or change in history and in things according to the Hegelian mind was inevitable. In his text *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, Hegel lays out the ramification of his theory of this dynamic principle of development. He says: “Abstractly considered, historical change has long been understood in general as involving a progress to something better, something more perfect.”<sup>2</sup> In Hegel’s mind, the world is in a constant state of flux but this flux is not directionless. What Hegel calls the “Spirit” moves the dialectic in history toward a more perfect state.

But Hegel does not stop there regarding the various aspects of this change. He observes:

In this regard, doubt has been raised as to whether human beings have become better at all through the progress of history and civilization, whether their morality has improved: i.e., insofar as morality is seen to be based only on subjective intention and insight, on whatever the acting individual sees as right or wrong, good or evil – not on a principle concerning what is right and good, bad and evil in and for itself (or on the basis of a religion regarded as being true). We can spare ourselves the trouble of illustrating the bare formalism and error of such a view, and of establishing the true principles of morality (or rather, of ethics) against this false morality. For world history moves on a higher level than that on which morality properly exists. (We shall take morality to refer to private sentiment, the conscience of individuals, their own personal wills and modes of action. These have their own independent value, responsibility, reward or punishment.)<sup>3</sup>

One can hear Nietzsche in the background with his *ubermensch* or superman who is beyond good and evil. Yet, the thing of importance for our discussion is the inversion of morality. Morality is no longer concerned with establishing objective unchanging principles since everything is changing. Rather, the morally upright person is the one who follows his own private sentiment. In these passages we begin to see the intellectual foundation for modern man’s superiority complex. Modern man is proud, in the sense of estimating himself to be better than prior generations, because he takes

himself and his private sentiment as the principle of judgment of what is right and wrong. Prior generations did not have this insight. The good person is not the one who conforms himself to an objective moral standard based upon the nature of man and the natural law, but the person who follows private sentiment.

If change is inevitable, what of virtue which makes a man more constant? Hegel says:

*Habit* (like the watch wound up and going by itself) is what brings natural death. Habit is activity without opposition: only formal duration is left to it, in which the fullness and depth of one's purpose no longer needs to be given voice – one leads an external sensory existence, so to speak, no longer immersed in the object. In this way, individuals as well as peoples die a natural death. And although a people may go on existing, it is an existence without life or interest, without need of its institutions because the need has been satisfied - a political nullity and boredom. For a truly universal interest to arise, the Spirit of a people must come to the point of wanting something new. But where could this new thing or purpose come from? It would be as if the people had a higher, more universal ideal of itself, going beyond its present principle – but in this there would be a new and more determinate principle, a new Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

If habit leads to natural death, then so does virtue, since virtue is a good habit. For Hegel, those stuck in habits are no longer immersed in the object. By this it would seem that Hegel is saying that one cannot live, one cannot experience the object (i.e. one dies) if one always relates to something in the same way all of the time. But since change is for the better, to be stuck in habits is to be outmoded, or in modern parlance, to be *passé*. Those who change with the times are simply better or, we may say, more enlightened people who experience life more.

What assurance does Hegel give to those who do not share his optimistic view of modern man or the future? He says:

This restless succession of individuals and peoples that are here for a time and then disappear suggests one general thought, one category above all, that of universally prevalent *change*. And what leads us to apprehend this change in its negative aspect is the sight of the ruins of some vanished splendor.<sup>5</sup>

Hegel goes on to say that this death or change of things is the emergence of new life. In other words,

just wait and things will get better. So those who think things are bad must simply be patient, let the changes in modern life take hold, and then things will be better.

At roughly the same time but a bit before Hegel, lived a man named Marie Jean Antoine Caritat, also known as the Marquis de Condorcet or Condorcet for short. In a text entitled *The Future Progress of the Human Mind*,<sup>6</sup> Condorcet goes a little further than Hegel in applying this progress to man by saying that man is perfectible. Now even the Christian would admit that man is perfectible but not without God's grace and help. However, materialism was (and is) dominating the natural sciences and so, if man is going to be perfected, he must be perfected by natural causes.<sup>7</sup> For Condorcet, the progress in relation to man was also more than Hegel had envisioned: "in the end, the human species must become better, either by new discoveries in the sciences and the arts, and by a necessary consequence, in the means of particular well being and common prosperity, or by progress in the principles of conduct and in the moral experience"<sup>8</sup> and "...the truths whose discovery has cost the most effort, which at first could be grasped only by men capable of profound thought, are soon developed and proved by methods no longer beyond the reach of ordinary intelligence."<sup>9</sup>

Condorcet thought that man would be perfectible because he would make new discoveries which would make it possible for him to be perfected, not just morally, but intellectually as well. What is more, the person of average intelligence would eventually learn those things known only to those capable of profound thought. The modern man appears to believe that since he is aware of modern scientific theories, he is somehow more knowledgeable than his predecessors.

Condorcet goes on to note the sociological changes that would occur from these discoveries and from man's process of being perfected:

Among the progress of the human mind that is most important for human happiness, we must count the entire destruction of the prejudices that have established inequality between the sexes, harmful even to the sex it favors. One would look in vain for reasons to justify it, by differences in physical constitution, by those one might try to discover in the strength of their intelligence, moral sensibility. This inequality has no other source but the abuse of power, and men have tried in vain to excuse it by sophisms.<sup>10</sup>

One of the signs of the civilization that has reached a certain level of advancement, i.e. once man

himself has advanced to a certain stage, inequality among the sexes will be wiped out. Those in the modern context would agree that we are more advanced than our predecessors because we recognize the radical equality of men and women.<sup>11</sup>

Before we pass to Auguste Comte, there is a French individual in this area of discussion that is worthy of note. Anne-Robert Jacques Turgot, in his second discourse in the work entitled *Successive Progresses of the Human Spirit*,<sup>12</sup> argued that human societies pass through cycles of barbarism and civilization. Barbarism is accompanied by superstition whereas civilization is accompanied by the fruits of reason. Human restlessness, a taste for liberty and a critical spirit elevate societies into civilization, but then these drives become institutionalized and conservative and eventually the very impediments of further progress. Reason gives way to superstition, and society falls back into barbarism. The point here, at least for our modern man, is that if he is to be civilized, he must be a liberal. Conservatism is associated with barbarism, superstition and lack of progress.

While prior authors had argued that man would continue to progress intellectually, it is Comte who gives a more explicit direction to that development. He says:

This law consists in the fact that each of our principal conceptions, each branch of our knowledge, passes in succession through three different theoretical states; the theological or fictitious state, the metaphysical or abstract state, and the scientific or positive state. In other words, the human mind – by its very nature – makes use successively in each of its researches of three methods of philosophizing, whose characters are essentially different and even radically opposed to each other.<sup>13</sup>

Comte gives a kind of intellectual finalization to the Cartesian desire for certitude in knowledge.<sup>14</sup> While Descartes sought to give philosophy the same certitude as the empirical sciences, Comte simply dismisses the theological and metaphysical sciences all together. Only empirical sciences provide certitude and reflect mature thought. Comte continues:

Finally, in the positive state, the human mind, recognizing the impossibility of obtaining absolute truth, gives up the search after the origin and hidden causes of phenomena. It endeavours now only to discover, by a well-combined use of reasoning and observation, the actual laws of phenomena – that is to say, their invariable relations of succession and likeness.

In relation to the discussion of the modern man, he will be scientific and will not allow theological and metaphysical (or even philosophical) opinions to enter into his discussion of truth. Our generalized modern man is thoroughly committed to the empirical sciences as the only real means of improving the human condition and of providing clear answers to life's questions. On the societal level, empirical sciences would be applied to everything, including psychology and sociology.

Given the aforesaid, even though it is not by any means a complete account of the philosophical genesis of the modern superiority complex, we can see why Maurice Blondel makes the following observation:

If the outworn forms of a supposedly philosophical apologetic no longer make any impression on the mind of an unbeliever, and if the general movement of modern thought turns more and more against it, this is not, as we have seen, without good reason.<sup>15</sup>

Modern man cannot accept the old philosophical arguments in favor of a natural knowledge of God or the faith. These words sound similar to Schleiermacher's rejection of metaphysics as part of religion.<sup>16</sup> The reason is that the arguments do not appeal either to an immanentist whose principle of judgment is himself or to someone who only trusts the empirical sciences. Blondel delineates the immanentist mind even further:

In a phrase which must be explained but which indicates at once the seriousness of the conflict, modern thought, with a jealous susceptibility, considers the notion of *immanence* as the very condition of philosophizing; that is to say if among current ideas there is one which it regards making a definite advance, it is the idea, which is at bottom perfectly true, that nothing can enter into man's mind which does not come out of him and correspond in some way to a need for development and that there is nothing in the nature of historical or traditional teaching or obligation imposed from without that counts for him, no truth and no precept which is acceptable, unless it is in some sort autonomous and autochthonous.<sup>17</sup>

Blondel, accepting this principle himself insofar as he states that it is "perfectly true," asserts that immanentism makes self the principle of judgment of the very condition of philosophizing. He goes on to note that even our idea of the transcendent truths and beings is immanent insofar as it is our

own.<sup>18</sup> Even the discussion about God for the modern man only has meaning insofar as he experiences Him or some supernatural thing, i.e. even the discussion about God is in immanentist terms. Yet because our modern man puts his real trust in the empirical sciences, either he compartmentalizes the life of faith from the life of science or he simply leads a life of a practical atheist or agnostic. On the other hand, the “modern” man holds to Comte’s assertion that theological assertions are fictitious and in the end reflect a lack of maturity in thought.

Our modern man, then, can be described as following: he is immanentized which means he is focused on himself and makes himself the principle of judgment of reality and his experiences. He follows private sentiment, which makes sense since he is an immanentist. He lacks habit or virtue since he is not stuck in a rut, so to speak, and this allows him to live life to the fullest by being “immersed in the object.” He may see the ruins of past glory but does not concern himself with it and waits for things to get better. He is more perfect than his predecessors and he is more knowledgeable about things known to those of profound thought. He is a feminist and a liberal and a believer in the empirical sciences.

## II. Is Modern Man Truly Superior?

For the sake of coherence, a two-fold approach to modern man’s superiority complex will be taken. The first is to examine the interior arguments of the authors in favor of man’s progress. The second is to take a look at the reality of modern man to see if, in fact, he is superior to his ancestors (a) in the order of knowledge, (b) in morals, (c) socially and politically and (d) in the order of philosophical and religious understanding.

When considering the various arguments in favor of modern man’s superiority, a number of problems come to mind but we will focus only on a few. The first is the premise upon which the entire discourse is based, viz. that (a) all things are changing (b) for the better. It is not true that all things are changing. While it does appear to be true that all material things change accidentally, it is not true that they are changing in their natures. The nature of man has not changed since man appeared on this planet. If one were to assert that the human species is not the same now as it was when man first appeared, then one would be forced into saying something very different. For

instance, if one were to assert that modern man had evolved to something different in his nature, he would no longer be man in the same sense. If the essence of man changes, he is no longer a man and to call two things with different natures the same species is at best equivocation and at worst contradictory. This is the weakness of evolution in relation to the changing of species. For instance, to say that man evolved out of an ape is a non-sensical statement from a grammatical and epistemological point of view. One cannot say that “*man evolved* out of an ape” because man did not exist yet to evolve. If one asserts that apes evolved into human beings then one has the same problem. The ape does not become man because once the essential characteristics of the ape change, it is no longer an ape. Rather, one would have to assert that the ape existed until a certain point at which time the ape would cease to exist and then man appeared. The nature or essence of man has not changed. Therefore, it is not true that everything is changing. Nor is it the case that everything is changing for the better and we will discuss that in relation to man below.

The next thing that does not change are the laws of nature. In fact, the entire empirical scientific endeavor is based precisely on the fact that one can predict the outcome of an experiment based on the laws that govern the experiment. In the empirical sciences, unless an experiment can be reproduced under the same conditions and achieve the same result because of the unchanging laws of nature, then it is not permissible to assert the outcome of one’s experiment as proving with certitude one’s theory or hypothesis. We are able to put a man on the moon because the laws of gravity and thermodynamics are constant and never change. Therefore, it is more accurate to assert that some things change and some things do not and only those things change which by their nature are capable of being changed while those which cannot change do not.

Hegel’s assertion that habit brings death is hardly the case. While it is true that bad habits can bring death to a person or even to a culture and civilization, good habits are the very life and foundation of a culture or civilization. For example, the moral virtue of justice is the foundation for the existence of any society. To see the truth of this, imagine a society where the habit of justice was lacking. People would be stealing, killing, hurting each other, etc. Commerce would be impossible because people would be constantly committing theft, fraud and deceit. These are just a few examples to demonstrate that no society could last very long if people were not habitually just to each other. In fact, the more a society is imbued with the habit of justice, the more peaceful it is.

Hegel also asserts that when one falls into a habit one cannot be immersed in the object. Nothing could be further from the truth. Because human beings require repeated exposure to things to learn about them in depth, habit is the very basis of learning. It is only after dealing with an object in the same way over the course of time that a person begins to understand how the object functions and it is the foundation for the certitude of what a person knows about the object. If someone never had the same experience with an object, he would not know if his past experience is the way the thing normally is. How would one ever come to know that physical laws are, in fact, laws which apply always and everywhere if our approach to things constantly changed? It must be conceded that from time to time it does help to take a different approach and a fresh look at something, but this can only be beneficial when one has developed proper habits in relation to a thing so that one has some foundational knowledge of the thing.

Next, in examining Comte's assertion that (1) there are laws of successive states of the human mind and of phenomena and (2) his assertion that one gives up on coming to knowledge of the absolute truth, we see that they are inherently contradictory. For a law is precisely something which applies everywhere in all cases; in other words, it is absolute. If one can discover the truth about it, one would have knowledge of a truth which is absolute. Comte has an even greater problem. There is no way to empirically verify his assertion that all human minds go through the three stages. Indeed, such a statement is not an empirical statement but an abstraction or induction from a few instances or "perceived" states of affairs. Therefore, are we to assume that his abstraction is merely an extension of the fictitious or theological state of Comte's mind?

To stop looking for absolute truth is irrational. First, to say that there is no absolute truth is an absolute statement. Hence, it is contradictory and irrational. The same criticism applies to those who say that all truth is relative. It is contradictory because one is asserting an absolute (all truth) of a relative subject (is relative). To proceed in discourse denying the principle of non-contradiction is irrational.

As to the assertion of Blondel's that "the outworn forms of a supposedly philosophical apologetic no longer make any impression on the mind of an unbeliever" and "the general movement of modern thought turns more and more against it, this is not, as we have seen, without good reason" needs clarification. To the immanentists and to the person who has adopted modern philosophical

thought, this line will ring true since modern philosophical thought has epistemologically cut itself off from reality<sup>19</sup> which is the basis of the scholastic philosophical apologetic or argumentation. In other words, when the principle of judgment is self and not reality, the scholastic arguments will have no appeal since they are based in reality. However, it is not true that these apologetics or arguments have no appeal to the unbeliever: there are examples of men who have converted as a result of these philosophical arguments, even after the time of Blondel. It is not that *modern* man cannot accept the scholastic arguments as it is that *modernist* man cannot accept them. Those men who live in the modern world but who do not accept the philosophical points of departure of modern philosophy are capable of accepting the scholastic arguments as true.

Now we come to the question of whether modern man is in fact superior to his predecessors. The first area we want to look at is whether modern man is superior to his predecessors in the order of knowledge. Condorcet asserted that what could be grasped only by men capable of profound thought would not be beyond the reach of ordinary intelligence. In one sense this is true, insofar as many of the scientific discoveries which required a depth of knowledge and intelligence beyond the ordinary man are capable of being known to those without the same degree of intelligence and depth of thought, e.g. scientists who discovered various radio waves and designed devices to transmit by means of radio waves were on the cutting edge of scientific knowledge of their day. Today many of us are aware of radio waves and how one can transmit information, voices, etc. over them. However, we must recognize that while many of us might be knowledgeable about radio waves and the ability to transmit them, how many of us know the actual mechanism in nature which makes this possible? How many of us understand how a radio actually works as to the details as well as the physics behind its means of reception and transmission? Not many. Most of the technology and scientific theories grasped by the common man are done in a superficial fashion, understanding only the basics of the theory. The gap between those in the various sciences and the common man without formal scientific training is widening. We might be aware of DNA but how many of us understand chemistry well enough to discuss the molecular makeup and chemical forming of DNA in a cell? Not many.

There are also certain things which the man of average intelligence simply does not have the time or the intellectual wherewithal to be able to understand.<sup>20</sup> For example, some might be aware that God's existence can be demonstrated through the natural light of reason without an appeal to

revelation,<sup>21</sup> but how many understand the philosophical principles which make grasping the truth of the argument possible? We might be aware of the fact that Einstein came up with the theory of relativity which gave us the ability to know that time is not always constant due to the effect that motion has on the passage of time, but how many of us can even give a definition of time? The point is that there simply are certain things which go beyond the person of average intelligence because of the degree of intelligence necessary to grasp them. Only in a radical egalitarian society would this be denied because radical egalitarianism fails to take into account that people have various degrees of intelligence and abilities. While it might be appetitively appealing, radical egalitarianism is not rooted in reality.

Another aspect of the knowledge of the average person today manifests that there is a growing ignorance in the average person on the street. For instance, the person of average intelligence a hundred and fifty years ago knew how to saddle and ride a horse; how many people today know how to do that? One of the side effects of technology is that it frees up the average person on the street from having to know how to do certain things to get the desired results. Our making use of a technological gadget as a medium between us and the thing separates us from a more concrete knowledge of the thing. For example, someone who knows how to turn on a sewing machine which is computer controlled and can make beautiful and intricate designs is more than likely not going to know how to make those designs if he has sew them by hand. In fact, one of the complaints in the various trade industries is that people are becoming less capable of working with their hands or developing a trade due to a lack of practical knowledge. A hundred and fifty years ago, the average person had to work with his hands day in and day out to do the simple chores around the house; when he was hired on to learn a trade, he had a basis for learning the trade because of his experience with working with various things. The average male in this country is raised spending a vast majority of his time in front of a television, computer or in recreation. As a result, he does not have the knowledge that comes from working with materials that someone a hundred and fifty years ago would have. Anecdotally, the author of this article was told the story of a young man who was hired on at a construction job but did not know how to use a shovel. The fact of the matter is that technology does free us up and makes it possible to know certain areas of knowledge but, at the same time, it can cause a decline in knowledge in other areas, since the person has no necessity to work

on knowledge in those areas because the technology takes care of him. What is happening in our culture is that extremes of knowledge are being known more and more by fewer and fewer people. Nor does it seem to be the case that the average modern man understands human nature any better than his counterpart a hundred years ago. While we might know more about the things that pertain to bodily health and things of that sort, modern man seems to be bent on the philosophical ignorance of his own nature. While some still study these things, they are fewer and fewer, or so it seems, as time goes on. Fewer and fewer people seem to have a rightly ordered and adequate grasp of the philosophical underpinnings of the modern empirical method and its limitations. At least in the past, men had a grasp of the fact that man was essentially different from all of the other animals and therefore had to be treated differently.

Moreover, our modern arrogance regarding our knowledge seems to have made us forget that we would not be where we are today both in the order of technology and in the order of empirical knowledge (or even philosophical and theological knowledge, for that matter) if it were not for our predecessors. It was their work, discoveries and intellectual achievements which made possible our modern society with all its technology and wonders. We tend to forget that the method of observation in the empirical sciences is not a modern invention. It began with Aristotle over 2300 years ago. This is why Hegel's observation that we ought not be worrying about the ruins of the past is not at all comforting. The "ruins" to which he refers are precisely the good things of the past that are denied those who follow them in the present and in the future. The growth in knowledge is something which requires that one person stand on the shoulders of his predecessor, meaning he is dependent on his predecessor for what he has provided him. Given all of the aforesaid, and given experience of the author of this article, modern man appears to be digressing more and more into a shallow ignorance since technology makes it possible for him to do so and still survive.

What of the claim that modern man is morally better than his predecessors? It is hard to see how this assertion can stand. The twentieth century, by all accounts, is considered one of the most bloody, if not the bloodiest, century in history. That century saw the rise of mass murderers, such as Stalin and Hitler. There is no evidence that modern man is more just, more temperate, more prudent or more courageous than his predecessors. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case.

One of the internal weaknesses in the above arguments has to do with Turgot's idea that

conservative societies are barbaric and liberal ones are civilized. There is no real foundation for making such an assertion. Our society is a contradiction to this very assertion. It is the opinion of this author that we live in a very liberal society and yet it appears that we are no more civilized than any other culture. For example, the United States has one of the highest murder rates of the world.<sup>22</sup> For those who are pro-life, this is one of the most barbaric countries in history; upon that analysis, one can say that considering how many countries have abortion, it is one of the most barbaric centuries in history. The French Revolution occurred during one of the most liberal periods in France, and yet it was one of the bloodiest periods of its history.<sup>23</sup> Advancements in technology and in certain aspects of empirical knowledge do not necessarily make modern man more moral. These things can actually be the means by which he is more treacherous, murderous and unjust.

What of modern man's sociological developments? Here again, there is no real indication that modern man is any more sociologically developed than his predecessors. The development of Nazism and Communism are indications that modern man does not understand how man functions. Given the general crime rate in the United States, it is hard to see how modern man can have any claim to a superiority over his predecessors. It is for these reasons that it is hard to see the truth of the statement from *Gaudium et Spes*: "Modern man is on the road to a more thorough development of his own personality, and to a growing discovery and vindication of his own rights"<sup>24</sup> or even the words from the same document: "The circumstances of the life of modern man have been so profoundly changed in their social and cultural aspects, that we can speak of a new age of human history. New ways are open, therefore, for the perfection and the further extension of culture."<sup>25</sup> What appears to have failed to be understood is the doctrine of original sin. Modern man is just as plagued by original sin as his predecessors and so it is hard to see how we have entered into a new age. Moreover, modern man appears to be more sinful and less contrite than in the past which is proof that technology does not necessarily take away sin and perfect the person morally but can be the opportunity for greater means to commit sin.

As far as the feminism of today, it is hard to see how it has improved the general lot of women. Now that most women work, they *must* work. Since there is a glut of workers on the market because of the presence of women in the workplace, the average wage can be much lower than that which would be required if only the husbands worked. Here it is a simple case of supply and

demand. Nor is it all clear that the treatment of women as a group of persons has improved. Women are raped, taken advantage of, used as objects of sexual manipulation and exploitation in an ever burgeoning pornography industry. The “free choice” movement, while asserting that women should have the right to work, generally looks down on women if they “choose” to stay at home. Ironically, the feminist movement has become a banner for bigotry against women who would prefer to stay home and raise their children. Women have fewer privileges than they did in the past; they were treated with greater reverence in the past. Granted physical and other forms of abuse occurred in the past, but there is no indication that this has waned. In fact, the feminist mentality has created such an atmosphere that it has become permissible or at least ignored when women batter their husbands.<sup>26</sup> It is hard to see how women are any happier.

Ironically, at the advent of modern man’s breakthrough to a more “enlightened” understanding of men and women, modern studies are showing more and more that men and women are simply wired differently.<sup>27</sup> What was known by virtue of common sense a hundred years ago seems to have to be discovered today through a formal study. Women have different emotional lives and needs than men. Women have a different physiological make-up and needs than men. It is a bit foolish to expect women who are chemically and biological different from men to act in the same way as men. It is analogous to expecting a car and plane to behave the same way even though they are mechanically different. Radical egalitarianism refuses to take into consideration the differences between men and women. As a result, radical egalitarianism is not capable of accentuating the perfections of feminine nature so that women can contribute more significantly to the welfare of society.

The last area in which we can consider whether modern man is superior to his predecessors is in the area of philosophy and theology. As to philosophy, it is clear that less and less philosophical advancement appears to be taking place. Few people study the various philosophers. Because of man’s diminishing philosophical knowledge, man understands himself less. This is manifest in the basic philosophical errors that manifest themselves in reasoning regarding evolution. In fact, one may say that basic philosophical errors are the very foundation, as has been seen in this presentation, for modern man’s superiority complex. His self judgment is not moderated by the humility that comes from studying the great philosophers, which gives one an intellectual grasp of modern man.

Regarding matters of religion, one thing is clear, most of the youth of today and even most adults are essentially religiously illiterate. Most Americans have some denominational background and yet a vast majority of people today do not even know the basic tenets of the particular religion to which they belong. Since the moral code of a society is often based upon the predominant religion and since most Americans do not know the basic tenets of their religion, perhaps this is one of the reasons behind the gradual decay in the moral life of America. There also does not seem to be a general deepening in religiosity in the average man today; if anything, modern man is becoming more and more irreligious, both in the order of knowledge and in the order of practice.

Within the Catholic Church itself, we also see modern man has a serious difficulty with doctrinal and moral authority. Since the principle of modern man is immanentism (self), he makes himself the standard of judgment rather than the authority of the Church. This does not mean that he always rejects what the Magisterium or Church says. Rather, he accepts or rejects a teaching, not because of the authority of the Church as such but only insofar as it fits his immanentist judgment.

Given all of the aforesaid, we can begin to see why, during the Second Vatican Council and afterwards, there was an ignoring of prior Magisterial documents. First, because in the modernist scheme things are always changing, the decrees and acts of the Magisterium prior to the Vatican II are outmoded and only have a meaning insofar as they congrue with the experience of modern man. Second, according to Blondel, religious matters have significance only when they come from us; this is behind his use of the terms *autonomous* and *autochthonous*. Therefore, tradition is blocked at its source since tradition does not come from us but is received from us. Yet, this thinking does establish an alternate tradition. Since religious matters come from us, we do not accept what came from others, but we do pass to others what comes from us. In other words, this thinking about religious matters is inherently contradictory. If the teaching is that religious matters must come from ourselves, it would begin and end with a single generation since the subsequent generation could not accept the teaching that religious matters come from ourselves since that would require us to accept that teaching from someone else. However, in the context of the Church, this contradiction never came to the fore of the minds of either those who propagated it or those who received it. What was received in the end was a rejection of all doctrinal and moral authority because it fits fallen man who judges what he is going to do based on self.

We also see that the idea that modern circumstances (we can say therefore modern man) was somehow different was one of the rationales behind changing the liturgical rites of the Church.<sup>28</sup> But it is clear as, a general rule, that modern man is not better than his predecessors, nor is he any better morally or spiritually. Therefore, it is hard to see how using the rationale that modern man or modern times need a changed liturgy will be cogent. In considering the last century and given the constant flux in the lives of people today on every level, it would have been better if the Church had kept the liturgical rites fixed so as to provide psychological and theological stability to modern man. In a certain sense, the Church lost a golden opportunity: if it had not tried to adapt itself to the times, it could have provided an unchanging beacon in a world that was changing, i.e. moving toward moral, sociological and psychological collapse under the weight of sin.

### Conclusion

The assertion that man is perfectible (without God's grace) and that he is getting better all of the time is simply unsupported both intellectually and in the concrete reality of modern man. If anything, culture and civilization seem to be eroding at an alarming rate. Modern man has no foundation intellectually or justification in reality for his superiority complex. His lack of humility is glaring in relation to his predecessors who, by means of secular and religious tradition, passed on good things and knowledge of the past making it possible for modern man to even have the lifestyle that he enjoys. If modern man is to recoup his humility, he must re-embrace his religious, intellectual, moral and spiritual patrimony.

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End notes

1.Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion* (Sheed and Ward, London, 1929), p. 4.

2.G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1988), p. 57.

3.Ibid., p. 70.

4.Ibid., p. 78.

5.Ibid., p. 76.

6.In French it is known as *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*.

7. Later with Darwin, et al., the perfectibility of man would be rooted in material and natural efficient causes only.

8. Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain; suivi de Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres*: par Condorcet, à Paris, chez Masson et fils, 1822, 1 vol. in-8°, pp. v-viii, dixième époque: "Enfin, l'espèce humaine doit-elle s'améliorer, soit par de nouvelles découvertes dans les sciences et dans les arts, et par une conséquence nécessaire, dans les moyens de bien-être particulier et de prospérité commune; soit par des progrès dans les principes de conduite et dans la morale pratique."

9. Ibid.: "les vérités dont la découverte a coûté le plus d'efforts, qui d'abord n'ont pu être entendues que par des hommes capables de méditations profondes, sont bientôt après développées et prouvées par des méthodes qui ne sont plus au-dessus d'une intelligence commune."

10. Ibid.: "Parmi les progrès de l'esprit humain les plus importants pour le bonheur général, nous devons compter l'entière destruction des préjugés, qui ont établi entre les deux sexes une inégalité de droits funeste à celui même qu'elle favorise. On chercherait en vain des motifs de la justifier par les différences de leur organisation physique, par celle qu'on voudrait trouver dans la force de leur intelligence, dans leur sensibilité morale. Cette inégalité n'a eu d'autre origine que l'abus de la force, et c'est vainement qu'on a essayé depuis de l'excuser par des sophismes."

11. One is left with the ironic fact that Condorcet committed suicide when he was arrested during the French revolution (See Fredrick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* [Image Books, New York, 1994], vol. IX, p. 19. Apparently things were not getting better, at least for him.

12. It appeared in French in 1750 under the title of *Progrès successifs de l'esprit humain*.

13. Auguste Comte, *Introduction to Positive Philosophy* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis, 1988), p. 1.

14. See Rene Descartes, *Discourse of Method*, passim.

15. Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1994), p. 150.

16. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion* (trans. by John Otto, Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, 1958), second speech, passim.

17. Blondel, op. cit, p. 151f.

18. See ibid., p. 156. Some authors argue that Blondel did not commit himself entirely to the principle of immanence. See translators note on page 152 of Blondel, op. cit. and Peter J. Bernardi, "Maurice Blondel and the Renewal of the Nature-Grace Relationship," as found in *Communio* 26 (Winter 1999), p. 811.

19. See Etienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* [San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1986].

20. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 1 and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, b. I, c. 4.

21. For example, see ST I, q. 2. 3 and Vatican I, *Filius Dei*.

22. A 1991 Senate Judiciary Committee report stated that "In 1990, the United States led the world with its murder, rape and robbery rates."

23. See E. Michael Jones, *Libido Dominandi – Sexual Liberation and Political Control*, part I, passim.

24. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* [Translation of Latin Original by the Holy See], para. 41.

25.Ibid., para. 54.

26. See article by Karen S. Peterson entitled “Studies Shatter Myth about Abuse,” at [http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2003-06-22-abuse-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2003-06-22-abuse-usat_x.htm).

27. Recent brain studies provide ample proof that men and women are designed differently. Any general search on the internet will provide ample examples.

28. See Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, paras. 4, 88 and 107.

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